

**Idaho Fish and Game Commission
Annual Meeting – January 11-13, 2006
Fish and Game Headquarters
Boise, Idaho**

January 11, 2006

The meeting convened at 8:00 a.m. with Commissioners Gibbs, Wheeler, Irby, McDermott, Power, and Wright present.

Commissioner Wheeler Assumes Chair and Opening Comments

Commissioner Wheeler accepted the gavel from Commissioner Gibbs and assumed the chairmanship of the Commission for calendar year 2006. The Director presented Commissioner Gibbs with a box of shotgun shells in recognition of his service as Commission Chair for 2005.

Workshop

The Director noted that the first part of the workshop would be a run-through of the information slated to be presented to the House Resources and Conservation Committee later in the day.

Wolf Management

Jim Caswell, Administrator, Office of Species Conservation, provided a timeline of wolf reintroduction and recovery (Appendix 39, Exhibit 1). He provided the Commission with a copy of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) signed on January 5 by Governor Dirk Kempthorne and Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton (Appendix 39, Exhibit 2). He also provided Commissioners with a copy of a letter signed in October by Governor Schweitzer of Montana and Governor Kempthorne regarding de-listing (Appendix 39, Exhibit 3).

Mr. Caswell outlined the delisting criteria and the issues that are preventing delisting. The major obstacle is that Wyoming does not have an approved management plan.

Commissioner Watts joined the meeting at 8:27 a.m.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) published the 10(a)(1)(A) notice in the Federal Register to allow Idaho to take the role of the Service in management of endangered wolves north of I90, which would give Idaho statewide management authority (Appendix 39, Exhibit 4). They will take public comment for 30 days, then analyze and make a decision.

The Department's request to the Forest Service to land helicopters in designated wilderness to radio collar wolves is pending. The collaring would occur at same time and place the Department is already surveying elk. The Department does these counts every 2-4 years. It is important to know what is going on with undocumented wolves and to locate den sites and rendezvous sites to get the whole picture. The Regional Forester in Ogden didn't deny the categorical exclusion, but he deferred it. If it gets deferred too long, the big game counts will be over and it will be moot. Staff is working on alternative ways that will probably be more intrusive than landing helicopters.

Steve Nadeau, Large Carnivore Program Manager, outlined the status of wolves in the state (Appendix 39, Exhibit 5). Wolf numbers increased again this year. Distribution has increased as well as density in some areas. Using a new technique the tribe and state have been working on, the new estimate of wolves in the state is 621 with 36 breeding pairs this year. USFWS has used breeding pairs as the recovery goal – 30 breeding pair distributed in the 3 states of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. Mr. Nadeau showed the distribution of wolves in Idaho (Appendix 39, Exhibit 6).

The Department now has two experienced wolf biologists in Regions 3 and 7 in addition to biologists in each region with responsibility for wolves. Seasonal help is also used in the summer. The Department has equipment distributed around the state specifically for wolf management, and training continues. Conservation Officers are getting trained and geared up to work with Wildlife Services to investigate illegal kills and wolf kills.

Mr. Nadeau provided an overview of livestock depredations over the last 3 years and control activity for the past year. OSC has \$100,000 set aside annually for depredation claims. It is discretionary on the part of OSC. There is a Board of Commissioners who consider claims and decide how much to pay.

Commissioner Wright asked what mortality rate could be for wolves and still maintain a stable population. Mr. Nadeau indicated that most research shows you can remove 30-40% of the animals annually and keep a stable population. Wolves have high reproductive rates. Based on research in Alaska and Canada, the National Academy of Sciences recommends removing 40-70% of the animals annually in order to reduce the population.

Jim Caswell explained that the annual budget for wolf management includes all players including the Nez Perce Tribe in order to have one package presented to the Congressional delegation. The request is for \$1.2 million, of which the state gets \$700,000 to do three things: set aside money for depredation, set aside money for study, remainder goes to management activities. About \$350,000 goes to Tribe and \$100,000 goes to USFWS locally.

Jim Unsworth provided Commissioners with the Executive Summary of the Department's proposal to the USFWS for wolf control in the Clearwater (Appendix 39, Exhibit 7).

Mr. Unsworth presented an overview of the Department's Wolf Control Proposal that he will deliver to the Legislature later in the day (Appendix 39, Exhibit 8). The basis for the plan is an adaptive management framework. The proposal is for control action in the Lolo Zone and using the Selway Zone as scientific control to monitor both elk and wolf populations. Idaho is well under management objectives for bulls and cows in the Lolo Zone. The area of biggest concern is wolf predation on cow elk. The Department has done extensive modeling and has used components from literature and Fish and Game's own research efforts all of which predict continued elk population declines. Under the current conditions, elk population will not meet state goals.

Other conservation measures are being pursued to increase elk populations including the Clearwater Elk Initiative and Senator Crapo's Elk Collaborative. Caps have been placed on hunter numbers, rifle cow elk hunting has been eliminated, and the Department has increased black bear and mountain lion harvest.

The Department's preference is to manage wildlife populations through regulated harvest of wolves by hunters. However, the 10(j) Amendment does not allow that. The Department proposes to reduce wolves in the Lolo Zone by 75% - that is the target you have to meet to reduce actual wolf numbers. The proposal is to do this for 5 years to maintain the wolf population at 25-40% of current levels. Idaho has a higher density of wolves per 1,000 elk in the Lolo Zone than they do in Northern Yellowstone. Cost of removal would be covered under federal funding through OSC.

External peer review of the management proposal is ongoing, with responses due by January 1st. Staff will incorporate comments and put the proposal out for public review by the last week of January. Public meetings will be held to get input. Final revisions will be done, and the proposal will be sent to FWS by the end of February or the first part of March. Commissioners asked staff to expedite posting the proposal for public comment.

In summary, Mr. Unsworth noted the following:

There is a harvestable surplus of wolves.

Wolf predation on cow elk is at an unacceptable level

All other factors are being addressed

Proposed management action will not impact wolf recovery on a statewide basis.

Lands Overview

Jeff Gould presented information on the Department's land holdings (Appendix 39, Exhibit 9). He provided Commissioners with a handout containing information on funding sources and a list of surplus property (Appendix 39, Exhibit 10).

Currently, the Department's land assets include a total of 225 parcels totaling 202,344 acres. In addition, the Department has 10 easements covering 17,712 acres. These easements range in size from 1 acre to 16,000 acres. This does not include land managed but not owned by the Department. There are agreements in place for all land managed by the Department. Fish and Game is the only state agency that pays fee-in-lieu-of-taxes. This is paid only on property owned by the Department that is undeveloped and greater than 10 acres.

By code, the Department must notify county commissioners when considering acquisitions of greater than 15 acres. In 2003, the Commission created its first Land Acquisition Policy. The Department then revised its Land Acquisition Policy to focus on priority habitats, access, mitigation, and additions to existing holdings. The Lands Committee was also established. The Department's policy addresses standard operating procedures for land acquisitions. The Lands Committee is comprised of Gregg Servheen, Jeff Gould, a fisheries representative, and representatives from each of the seven regions. The Committee is directed by the Deputy Director. The first filter for every land acquisition (easement or fee title) is the Regional Supervisor. Each proposal starts at the Region and then goes to the Lands Committee for a check of 3 criteria – 1) is Department ownership the best approach? 2) does the proposal comply with strategic and operational plans? and 3) will there be significant local support. Proposals that make it past these threshold questions are critically reviewed by the Lands Committee using established criteria for decision making. It would then either go back to the Region to work out problems or to the

Director for review. The Director then decides whether to seek Commission input or approval of an acquisition. There is a surplus property list and a process for deciding to divest of that property.

The Deputy Director commented that land ownership is a contentious issue. The Department owns only 7% of all state-owned land. Since the Department has put the current process in place, there has been no county commission oppose an acquisition that was proposed to them.

Gregg Servheen provided an analysis of the assets and future possibilities for Department lands. He detailed the strengths and challenges of the program (Appendix 39, Exhibit 9). He also detailed the opportunities for the program including identifying priority and strategic lands in the state, increasing acquisitions, conservation easements, and partnerships.

Possibilities for the future include looking at acquisitions from a statewide perspective and how they meet the Department's strategic goals. There are 6 backcountry properties on the list of 29 surplus properties. There are 6 other backcountry ranches that are not on the list. There are some restrictions on backcountry properties in terms of whether they can be sold or exchanged. They were all purchased with assistance of PR funds. The Department would need to work with FWS to get their approval and convert the proceeds to other wildlife habitat. Dallas Burkhalter, Deputy Attorney General, noted that there are some statutory restrictions on the Commission selling property. The Department must work through the State Land Board, which has a system to protect against the highest bidder. There is a complicated process that includes a bid process. The Commission is statutorily authorized to exchange land for specific purposes. Mr. Burkhalter can look into the process for acquiring money for key land acquisitions, but any monetary sale would need to go before the Land Board.

The Commission asked the Lands Committee to look at the opportunities for selling or exchanging lands to benefit the sporting public. The Department needs a coordinated view and to prioritize what will be done with the proceeds.

The other conversion opportunity is the Bonneville Power Administration program. It may be possible to relieve BPA of its Idaho wildlife mitigation debt in exchange for cash that can be used as the Department sees fit. Staff will put together more in-depth information on the opportunities and strategies for repositioning some of the Department's land assets presented during the workshop for the May meeting.

Wolf Control Proposal

The Chairman and Director addressed how to handle the media regarding the Department's wolf management proposal. The presentation and handouts are public knowledge. The 40 page document is still under peer review and not ready for public review yet. Jim Unsworth noted that peer review comments thus far would not change the content of the Executive Summary. Revision of the full proposal based on peer review will be on the fast track, and the proposal will be out for public review as soon as possible.

The Department can provide the media with the Executive Summary and both the Executive Summary and Mr. Unsworth's presentation on the web. The Communications Bureau is preparing a press release

for distribution on Friday after the Commission takes action on the proposal. Commissioner Gibbs noted that he told the press the proposal would be available after the presentation to the Legislature today.

Recess

The workshop recessed at 12:15 p.m. for Commissioners to attend a joint meeting of the House Resources and Conservation Committee and the Senate Resources and Environment Committee to present the Department's wolf management proposal.

Chairman Wheeler called the Workshop to order again at 3:42 p.m.

Lands (cont.)

Commissioners discussed the need to solidify the information on the lands assessment and decide what the functional categories will be, what funding mechanisms are available, and how to align those with specific pieces of property. The Department needs a vision for the future. Staff were directed to have information prepared for the Commission's May meeting.

The Director encouraged Commissioners to meet with regional habitat managers to understand the Regional vision on where the Department is going with lands, what the needs are, and what is important.

Commissioner Irby commented that the program needs to work functionally from a statewide perspective and regional boundaries should be dropped. He also urged caution because valuable lands purchased today will become increasingly expensive to manage in the future.

Gregg Servheen explained the process to negotiate a lump sum settlement with BPA. It would require a Commission decision to pursue that option. The Department could negotiate on the Department's portion of the mitigation, but this would likely need to be done in conjunction with the Tribes. Staff will clarify the Tribe's potential involvement by the May meeting. Staff will also get some information from Montana on the process they negotiated with BPA and any suggestions they may have to offer.

Commissioners discussed how they could get a sense of the land holdings in other regions. A tour of the regions or a map of the land holdings by region or county are options. Commissioners also discussed the Department's backcountry ranches. Many of the ranches were bought originally to get livestock off the land. The Department has held on to them some as patrol cabins and from the standpoint of access. Commissioners discussed Access Yes, purchasing easements, and other opportunities.

The workshop recessed at 4:40 p.m.

RULES

Public Hearing

Chairman Wheeler called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. He welcomed the public and introduced Commissioners McDermott, Irby, Watts, Wright, Gibbs, and Power. The Director introduced staff. Chairman Wheeler commented that the Commission takes public comment seriously.

Herb Myer from Mountain Home commented that he hopes Idaho will have sufficient federal funding for wolf management and that the Department will get permission to land helicopters in the wilderness. He mentioned his testimony at the July meeting regarding Henry's Fork and thanked the Department for meeting with the Henry's Fork Foundation. He hopes to get another discussion on research, water quality, sediment and dredging scheduled in the future.

Tom Demorest, outfitter and owner of the Diamond D Ranch in the Middle Fork Zone of the Frank Church Wilderness commented that the Department and Commission have done all they can to solve the wolf problem. He believes there will always be barriers to delisting. He suggested that the Congressional delegation be told to pass a law to eliminate listing of the wolf in Idaho.

Nate Helm, SFW, provided the Commission with written comments.

Lloyd Thies, from Nampa, spoke on behalf of the handicapped. He had difficulty getting a doctor's certification for a handicapped permit because it would have required an expensive blood test. He asked the Commission if they could address this issue and look into whether anything can be done. He also commented that the disabled should be allowed to use ATVs on the roads that are closed to other motorized vehicles.

Suzanne Stone, Boise office of Defenders of Wildlife, has been working on wolf issues for the last nearly 20 years. Defenders works on a range of issues across the country. In the Northern Rockies, they work on wolf depredation losses and how to reduce losses and resolve conflicts. They are very concerned about the wolf management proposal for the Clearwater. They feel that habitat issues have a more significant impact on elk herds than wolf predation does. Defenders is disappointed that the first action the State of Idaho will take under its new authority is to kill wolves. Ms. Stone encouraged the Commission and Department to collaborate with wildlife groups. They would like to see the full wolf control proposal as soon as possible.

Cathy Daly, of Boise, asked the Commission to consider a short-term hunting license, similar to the fishing license, so that visitors can hunt for one or two days and not have to purchase a season license. She also commented that wolves have always been in Idaho and weren't extinct, and she supports some control action.

Craig Peters, of Nampa, would like to have handguns added to short-range weapons description for use in hunts restricted to short-range weapons only.

Jonathon Oppenheimer, Idaho Conservation League, has worked on Clearwater issues including elk, salmon, steelhead and trout. He also participated in Senator Crapo's Elk Collaborative and noted that the Commission endorsed the Collaborative's recommendations. That effort included looking at wolf effects on elk. The League supports Idaho's role in wolf management but believes Fish and Game needs to develop expertise to carry out management. They are concerned that there is not a scientific basis yet or the evidence to support the position that wolves are the primary reason for the decline of elk numbers in the Clearwater. Habitat plays a much larger role, and the problem is due to a combination of complicated factors. The League is concerned that the wolf control proposal is being rushed, and he urged the Commission to slow it down and get more input from the public. The Idaho Conservation League is

committed to working with OSC, the Commission, and the Department to work through concerns. He believes that rushing the effort will harm relationships with partners and collaborators.

Doug Schleis, Idaho Sportsmen's Caucus Advisory Council (ISCAC), commented on the LAP tag program. The ISCAC's position is that LAP be returned to its original intent and structure with regard to three items: 1) that landowners who draw tags may designate any member of their immediate family as the tag holder, the tag is not transferable, and only one person may be designated for a corporate landowner, 2) that reasonable public access be granted by the landowner, and 3) that no more than 10 percent of the tags in an over-subscribed unit may be designated for LAP. Mr. Schleis commented that sportsmen have not gotten anything in return for the LAP program.

Cherie Barton, Idaho Wildlife Federation, expressed the Federation's position that the LAP program remain fundamentally unchanged. They would like to see participation restricted to owners' properties only. They advocate the use of Access Yes type programs and support additional funding. The Federation is against the sale of tags in any way, and they don't want to see Idaho's natural resources compromised. Regarding a bonus points system, the Federation recommends that no final action be taken without public review. The survey was good, but it was not a description of a particular program. Upon questions from Commissioner, Ms. Barton stated that the Federation would like to see all loopholes in the LAP program, including selling access, stopped. They would rather the Commission did not allow the transfer of tags at all.

Rick Carosone, of Idaho Falls, spoke in opposition to the Department implementing a bonus point system. He commented that a system would discourage recruitment of new hunters and would be a detriment to future generation of hunters. Bonus point systems penalize young hunters. He feels the current system is fair because everyone has the same odds. He supports longer wait times and putting in for only one species.

Bob Minter spoke as a member of the ISCAC. The group's consensus is that if a bonus point program is implemented, it be fully supported by a separate participant fee, and not come at the expense of other wildlife programs. In addition, should the Commission take action on a bonus point system, it should be presented in an open forum for sportsmen input prior to being submitted for legislative approval or final implementation. Mr. Minter welcomed Commissioner McDermott to the Commission.

Paul Valcara spoke in opposition to a bonus points system. The current system provides the best odds, and he doesn't understand why the Commission wants to change it. A youth hunter should have an equal chance or a new hunter of any age. There are people who think they need preference, but they haven't earned it just by putting in.

Grant Simonds, Idaho Outfitters and Guides Association (IOGA), spoke regarding outfitter allocation. The IOGA supports proposed changes to controlled hunt allocation but would like to see some flexibility. He asked the Commission to allocate up to 6 percent of the tags in an eligible controlled antlered deer and/or elk hunt rather than 3 percent. This option would allow the Commission to consider one tag for an outfitted client in a controlled hunt with a minimum of 10 tags. This would be in concert with the original intent of allocation that it be fair and proportionate among resident, nonoutfitted nonresidents, and outfitted hunters. The IOGA does not support extending the waiting period to two years for hunters

successfully drawing a controlled hunt permit for elk or deer. This would impose a hardship on outfitters with controlled hunt clients.

Terry Henrickson, of Nampa, commented on the bonus point system. He believes that Idaho has the best system. Other states such as Wyoming that have implemented a bonus points system have had to revise their systems, and hunting there has become a rich man's sport. A bonus point system would complicate things, and you can't get kids interested in hunting if they can't draw. Mr. Henrickson also commented that wolves have decimated the moose population in Unit 12.

Roy Farrar, President of the Wolf Education Research Center, stated that having the first management act of the state of Idaho be a control action to annihilate 75% of the wolf population in the Lolo Zone sets a bad example and gives Idaho a black eye.

Chuck Middleton, President of Idaho Chapter FNAWS asked the Commission to make the antelope archery hunt an unlimited control hunt. The waiting period after success should be two years as it is for sheep and goat.

Commissioner Wheeler thanked those who attended.

The public hearing was adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

January 12, 2006

MISCELLANEOUS

Chairman Wheeler called the meeting to order at 8:06 a.m. Commissioners Watts, Irby, McDermott, Power, Gibbs, and Wright were present.

Opening Comments

Chairman Wheeler gave the floor to Commissioner Gibbs who commented that the Department has come a long way, and he complimented the Director on his leadership. He feels the Commission may be missing an opportunity to meet with Idaho's Congressional delegation and suggested the Commission take a more active role including going with the Director to meet with the delegation.

Commissioner Gibbs also commented that the guidelines on claiming days worked should be revised to allow the Chairman to claim an additional day a month.

The Director explained that he tries to go to D.C. at least once during the winter and talk about Idaho wildlife issues particularly ESA issues. Every year since starting the State Wildlife Grants system, he has also visited the delegation in the early part of March to discuss the grants. The Director will find out what the timing is and send a note to Commissioners to see if they want to make the trip with him.

Review of Public Comment

Commissioners discussed Lloyd Thies' comments about the determination of his disability based on

oxygen levels in his bloodstream. Dallas Burkhalter pointed out that statute Chapter 36.11.01 contains specific medical criteria to qualify for the motorized vehicle permit. It would take a legislative change to address the blood oxygen levels. Steve Barton, Assistant to the Director, clarified that this piece of legislation was put forward by a special interest group in the 1970s. Since then, the Commission decided to accept the Department of Transportation criteria for a disabled vehicle permit. Commissioner Wright asked if there is a way to give special dispensation to handicapped hunter to ride their ATVs on closed roads.

The Director commented that it is very difficult to make everyone happy with various accommodations. If the Commission goes back to revise the code, it should be done to provide latitude. The disabled license subcommittee will get back together with outside interest groups and get their input and then see if there are any legislators who would like to sponsor a change in legislation.

Roger Fuhrman noted that the Department is continuing to gather information on road access and who to contact at the Forest Service to get permission. The web site is built and will be updated as more information is available.

The Director will meet with Senators Keough and Sweet on handicapped issues to let them know that the Commission is looking at opportunities to address some of these issues.

Instituting a two-day hunting license would require legislation. The Department did have a 3-day hunting license for birds once upon a time but there were very few sold and it was eliminated in an effort to simplify and consolidate licenses. The price difference was around 60% of the cost of a regular hunting license. This was a non-resident license.

The issue of short-range weapons comes up frequently. It is a technology question that the Department continues to discuss. Commissioners also noted the written comment from the gentleman with macular degeneration who wanted to use a lighted reticle in his scope.

Commissioners would like to discuss the archery antelope controlled hunt further.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The Director's Report to the Commission included an update on the WAFWA mid-winter meeting. WAFWA has developed curriculum at Colorado State University for a half master's degree in human dimensions using funding from an international grant. Each of the western states can nominate one person to participate with no charge to the Department.

The WAFWA meeting included discussion of conservation strategies for prairie species. There are now multi-species conservation efforts to accommodate a number of species that live in the same habitat.

The Director will be the Director's representative and policy liaison for the Southwest Mule Deer Habitat working group. The next habitat guidelines will affect our deer and it is a perfect fit for our Mule Deer Initiative.

The cougar management working group published guidelines recently. Some of the retired members of that group did not take the states' comments into account. The Directors are writing a letter to the group to indicate that as far as WAFWA is concerned these cougar management guidelines are not state of the art and not necessarily relevant to state management scenarios.

The Western Trout Initiative is getting off the ground to address western native trout habitat to preclude listings and species declines.

MISCELLANEOUS

Consent Calendar

The January Consent Calendar contained the minutes of the November 16-18 meeting and the November 28 and December 7, 2005 conference calls. It also contained the Financial Report for the period ending November 30, 2005, and the Department's recommendations for the Winter Feeding Advisory Committee.

Commissioner Watts requested an addition statement be added under **Election of Commission Chair and Vice Chair** in the November 16-18 minutes. The Director asked staff to transcribe the entire section rather than risk leaving out the desired information.

06-01 Commissioner Gibbs moved and Commissioner Watts seconded a motion **TO APPROVE ALL ITEMS ON THE CONSENT CALENDAR.** The motion carried unanimously.

Commission Reports

Magic Valley Region. Commissioner Wright reported that the winter of '05 has been one of extremes with an early freeze and then snow, which was hard for birds. Temperatures have moderated, and snowpacks are 110-115% of average. Ice fishing was good at Salmon and Magic reservoirs early in the season. Since then, ice conditions have deteriorated due to warmer temperatures. Local deer and elk populations are doing well. They went into winter with a lot of fat reserves. Fawns trapped around Twin Falls were 80lbs per animal. Mule deer herd classification activities went well in December. Mule Deer Initiative efforts are continuing. Local high school students who are growing bitterbrush to plant in the spring. A number of elk management activities are planned with a focus on Unit 48. Feeding operations began northwest of Ketchum to prevent elk from moving into town. Regional staff also began baiting elk on Warm Springs Golf Course to trap and relocate problem animals. Elk feeding will begin in the South Fork drainage in January due to snow conditions. CO Greg Wooten will be returning to work after his 2 year deployment with the military reserve.

Southeast Region. Commissioner Gibbs reported that Mark Gamblin, new Regional Supervisor has worked with former Senator Whitworth who testified at the Jerome meeting about the shoot from a motorized vehicle rule. Commissioner Gibbs would like the Department to provide written guidelines on what the permit entitles an individual to do to alleviate the confusion about these permits. The Region

had a poaching incident in the Malad area where a rancher was assaulted when he approached poachers. Officers investigated the incident but did not find the poachers. The Region's new information specialist did a story on the incident and someone turned the poachers in.

Salmon Region. Commissioner Power reported that the Region had a cold December and then a mild January thus far. Deer and elk captures have been proceeding, and aerial surveys on deer are being conducted. Things weren't looking good for mule deer with fawns averaging a little less than 70lbs. There have been declines in buck ratios and absolute buck numbers. Snow conditions are still light, so no winter feeding has started yet. The Region is dealing with the issue of deer in town. The Regional Supervisor and staff have worked with the City Council on solutions. Steelhead fishing is good. The warmer weather after the hard freeze caused ice to pile up at the mouth of the Middle Fork. The ice scoured out the river banks and beaver and otter were out.

Panhandle Region. Commissioner McDermott reported that Northern Idaho has had a mild, but very wet, winter thus far. The Region had a great deer season with 56% of white tail and 40% of mule deer 4-points or better. By late December the snowpack was 50% of average, but this has increased the last few weeks and is now about normal which bodes well for wildlife. Two depredation hunts are in the works for elk. The study involving wildlife passages shows constant use with white-tailed deer using them regularly and moose also using them. 18 black bears with GPS collars are being monitored. They are avoiding developed and open areas and using Hwy 95 as the home range boundary. The first half of deep water trapnetting was completed on Lake Pend Oreille. There will be a public hearing on January 21 on the Department's efforts to eradicate lake trout in Lake Pend Oreille to save the kokanee population. They expect a lot of public input. Enforcement efforts are ongoing.

Clearwater Region. Commissioner Irby reported that attendance at sportsmen breakfasts has been 50 to 100 people for those held at the new office. Access Yes and LAP permits remain a hot topic. The Commissioner has met several times with Potlatch Corporation. They want to partner with the Department. Forest Capitol is happy with Access Yes. The community of Weippe has raised most of the money for the first phase of the design plans for Deyo Reservoir. Steelhead fishing around Orofino is good. The Jack O'Connor Hunting Heritage and Education Center is progressing, and the dedication will be around March 15. The Commissioner and Regional Supervisor had a legislative briefing with local legislators at the Regional Office. Cal Groen presented and did a great job. The Region has had a fairly mild winter after a very cold December. Snow is wet and high. Jim Unsworth visited and updated the Commissioner on the 10(j) amendment and the wolf management plan moving forward. Commissioner Irby provided a handout on the Clearwater Pheasant Initiative. It has been very successful since its beginning in July 2001.

Southwest Region. Commissioner Watts reported on the WAFWA mid-winter meeting. There was a session on avian influenza and the plan to work with waterfowl flyways to understand how the virus could migrate to North America. Commissioner Watts spent time on wolves, recruitment and retention, military depredation hunts, sage and sharp-tailed grouse, salmon and steelhead fishing, and Conservation Officer recruitment strategy. The Resident/Non-resident quota issue was discussed. Legislative funding was discussed, and Wyoming just received 19.7 million from state general funds for the first time. California is looking at an automated license system. They expect it to be online by October 2007 at a cost of \$3.4 million. In Colorado, the USFWS identified Gunnison sage grouse as a candidate species

and species under court order for a listing rule. Utah is lowering its hunting age limit to 12 and eliminating the age limit for small game hunting. Utah also was investigated for selling licenses to convicted felons. They are looking at a system to see how to check those records. Utah has also identified a case of plague in deer. There is a new format for WAFWA Commissioner representatives. Idaho has been asked to do reports on access and department owned lands. At this meeting, there was a report on urban wildlife conflicts. Arizona did a presentation and emphasized consistent protocols. This may be interesting to the rest of the Commission and may be a good workshop topic.

In Region 3, the winter has been mild, and animals are doing well. No winter feeding is going on currently. 80 turkeys were transplanted from Region 1 to Region 3. The Region continues to wrestle with development and staff have been meeting with developers to discuss wildlife mitigation. Staff are catching deer in the Boise foothills and near Emmett to radio collar. For the first time, the Region released chukars on CJ Strike WMA. Pheasants are \$11.00-\$12.00 per bird and chukars are \$6.50/bird. So, it is less expensive and you can get more birds.

Upper Snake Region. Commissioner Wheeler reported the Region's winter precipitation is providing a chance to recover some reservoir fishing. Wildlife are doing well. The Region is not doing any winter feeding at the moment. The Mule Deer Initiative is being well received. Dealing with predators – information has been helpful. More money available and do more with coyotes. New RS – Steve Schmidt. He is from R6 and is familiar. He will be a good RS. Things are positive in Region 6.

RULES

Non-biological Rules for All Big Game Animals

Brad Compton, State Big Game Manager presented staff recommendations for non-biological rule changes including the following:

1. Changes to the rules for Outfitter Allocation to allow for more Commission flexibility in allocating tags/permits in controlled hunts.
2. Eliminating the separate non-resident deer tag in Southeast Idaho and making it a subset of the existing process beginning December 1. The Department has yet to meet or exceed the number of tags available, and it is costly and cumbersome.
3. Extending from May 31 to June 5 the controlled hunt application period for Deer/Elk/Antelope/Fall black bear. The intent is to reduce drain on the license system.
4. A boundary description change for Units 3 and 4 which referenced a road that no longer exists, and to Unit 2 clarify that Farragut WMA is included in the hunting closure for Farragut State Park.

Commissioners discussed the outfitter allocation and the IOGA's request to go up to 6% to provide additional flexibility.

06-02 Commissioner Gibbs moved and Commissioner Irby seconded a motion **TO ADOPT AS TEMPORARY RULES:**

CHANGES TO IDAPA 13.01.04.505 AS SHOWN IN APPENDIX 39, EXHIBIT 11, EXCEPT THAT THE LANGUAGE IN RULE 02.E. BE CHANGED FROM “NO MORE THAN THREE PERCENT (3%)” TO “UP TO 6%.”

CHANGES TO IDAPA 13.01.04.600.05 TO MAKE THE SEPARATE SOUTHEAST NONRESIDENT DEER TAG APPLICATION AND DRAWING PROCESS A PART OF THE EXISTING CONTROLLED HUNT APPLICATION AND DRAWING PROCESS.

CHANGES TO IDAPA 13.01.08.260.04(c) TO EXTEND THE CONTROLLED HUNT APPLICATION PERIOD FOR DEER/ELK/ANTELOPE/FALL BLACK BEAR FROM MAY 31 TO JUNE 5.

CHANGES TO IDAPA 13.01.08.600.02, 13.01.08.600.03, and 13.01.08.600.04 TO CHANGE A BOUNDARY BETWEEN UNITS 3 & 4 AND REVISE THE UNIT 2 DESCRIPTION TO CLARIFY THAT THE HUNTING CLOSURE WITHIN FARRAGUT STATE PARK INCLUDES FARRAGUT WMA.

THE MOTION WAS AMENDED FOR THE CHANGE TO IDAPA 13.01.04.505 TO READ “NO MORE THAN SIX PERCENT (6%)” RATHER THAN “UP TO 6%.”

The motion carried unanimously.

Further discussion ensued on handicapped archery permits. An individual recently brought to the Department’s attention that he only has one arm and can only use a bow with a drawlock. He asked the Department to consider a change allowing for use of a drawlock device or device that holds the bow at full or partial draw. Staff’s recommendation would be to make this change.

06-03 Commissioner Wright moved and Commissioner Gibbs seconded a motion **TO ADOPT AS A TEMPORARY RULE, CHANGES IN IDAPA 13.01.08.410.02 AS CONTAINED IN APPENDIX 39, EXHIBIT 12.** The motion carried unanimously.

REPORTS

Department of Agriculture

Deputy Administrator John Chatburn introduced Dr. Greg Ledbetter, the Department’s new Division of Animal Industries interim administrator/state veterinarian. Dr. Ledbetter provided an update on the brucellosis issue in the Swan Valley in eastern Idaho. Idaho will lose its brucellosis free status. Additional intensified testing and changes in management where there is wildlife/livestock interaction will be required. They could not find epidemiological evidence that the herd got the brucellosis from other livestock. The conclusion is that it was transmitted by elk in the region.

Idaho is appealing the decision to rescind its brucellosis-free status based on the contention that this was a one-herd incident. The USDA’s position is that the calf from the Swan Valley herd which was transferred to

a feedlot in Arco constitutes a second infected animal in a new herd. Both herds were depopulated, and there is no open end for this disease to spread. In order to get the brucellosis free status back, Idaho will have to show that it has been free from the disease for 12 months. Idaho will be using the same pattern of disease surveillance as Wyoming uses.

Commissioners discussed the trend of domestic cervid farms. Dr. Ledbetter commented that those farms are under close monitoring. The Department of Agriculture hasn't seen any indication of brucellosis infection in domestic cervid ranches to this point.

The Director commented that the Department is looking forward to working with Department of Agriculture on the issue. Mr. Chatburn commented that they appreciate the working relationship with Fish and Game.

Wyoming has just passed their anniversary date and have applied to get their class-free status back. Idaho has a copy of their report, which will provide a roadmap of what to do if Wyoming is successful. USDA is requiring cattle herds that have direct interaction with elk to have a mitigation plan to include in the MOU between the livestock board and USDA to identify how to keep spatial separation to prevent reinfection.

Non-biological Rules

Commissioner Gibbs asked staff to prepare a workshop session between now and next January to address hunting and fishing technology issues.

Sage-grouse Management Plan

Tom Hemker, Gamebird Program Coordinator, provided an update on the Idaho Sage-grouse Management Plan (Appendix 39, Exhibit 13). The Plan was primarily written by a subcommittee that had representatives from a broad range of stakeholder groups including OSC, Department of Agriculture, Department of Lands, Cattle Association, BLM, and Idaho Wildlife Federation to name a few. Everything was decided on consensus.

The goal of the plan is to maintain, improve, and where possible increase sage-grouse populations in Idaho while considering the predictability and long-term sustainability of a variety of other land uses.

There are 13 grouse management areas in the state. The Management Plan includes six chapters that cover Goals, guidance and resources for local working groups; Sage-grouse/sagebrush ecology; Status of populations & habitats; Threats and conservation measures; Research, monitoring and evaluation; and Implementation milestones.

Chapter 4 of the Plan on Threats and Conservation Strategies was developed with the assistance of a science panel convened in February of last year. Six experts were gathered including the Department Head, Fisheries and Wildlife Resources from the University of Idaho (U of I); Department Head, Rangeland Ecology and Management from the U of I; two other University of Idaho faculty experts on sagebrush and sage grouse; USGS; and Jack Connelly from Fish and Game. The group spent two days talking about the science, prioritizing the threats, and discussing options to address threats. Wildfire is the biggest threat. Sagebrush habitats take decades to recover after a fire. Based on those discussions, the Subcommittee

agreed that conservation measures should be implemented where feasible unless documented to be inappropriate at the site or project scale.

Final edits are being made to the plan, and it will be available to the public on March 1. Final edits will be made in April, and staff will bring the plan to the Commission for approval at the May meeting. This is a consensus plan including both sides of the spectrum. It is not a prescriptive plan but is designed to help local working groups get projects done on the ground.

The Commission thanked staff for their work on this plan. Discussion included what could be done on wildfires. Mr. Hemker explained that the BLM is reseeding with sagebrush. In addition, Department of Lands is planting sagebrush after fires with federal funding, and fire suppression has become a more important part of their program. Maps have been delineating key nesting habitat so that fire trucks go there first. New fire stations are being located closer to the areas of concern. Other avenues being considered include whether grazing can be managed better using fencing or other means. The agencies are also discussing ways to improve the BLM Jarbidge Resource Management Plan.

Mule Deer Initiative Update

Toby Boudreau provided an update of recent efforts of the Department's Mule Deer Initiative (Appendix 39, Exhibit 14). MDI Action Plan public meetings were held, and generated almost 600 public comments submitted from all regions and from non-residents. Nearly 500 more email addresses were added to the MDI update list.

Most people opposed to doe hunting cited specific units/areas that they felt should not allow doe hunting. Winter range protection and habitat were important. Wolf management was an important topic. There were a significant number of comments on trophy hunting and controlled hunts. The biggest comment was on ATVs – people want tougher regulations, bigger fines, and more enforcement. People were asked to rank the 6 components of MDI from least to most important. Habitat was most important area to concentrate on. The emphasis is to make things happen on the ground, and there were lots of offers to help.

Plantings are planned, deer are being collared, and elk are also being collared for the elk/deer interaction study. Composition and trend counts are ongoing. There were some weather delays in December. Coyote control will begin in late January and continue through June. Wildlife Services (WS) will get roadkill deer to use to aid in aerial operations to harvest coyotes. WS will provide updates on where the coyote take occurs. Outreach efforts include the new MDI Update newsletter which will be mailed to about 25,000 people and will be emailed and sent out with the Department tabloid.

LAP Subcommittee Update

Steve Elam, Landowner/Sportsmen Coordinator, Magic Valley Region, presented the results of the focus groups conducted by the LAP subcommittee on potential changes to the LAP program (Appendix 39, Exhibit 15).

The subcommittee was created to address concerns with the LAP program including how to deal with very large landowners, small landowners, oversubscribed hunts, and the situation where some landowners draw every year while others do not.

The focus groups were asked to discuss the Access Yes Pilot project concept, which would allow landowners to bid for controlled hunt tags available through LAP in exchange for hunting and fishing access to and/or through private lands. This concept would take advantage of the flexibility of Access Yes which has no minimum acreage requirements, applies to all wildlife species not just big game, and provides the ability to obtain additional tags.

Based on the focus groups, the take home message was that there is agreement on the concept but reservations about undefined details. Landowners liked the idea of getting additional tags and sportsmen liked the idea of more access.

Commissioner Wright asked for assurance or agreement from the Commission that the subcommittee is headed in the right direction and there is merit in putting together a pilot project to combine elements of LAP and Access Yes. Details would need to be carefully considered and it would likely take at least a year to put a project together. The Region would like to be able to implement a pilot program in 2007. The Region can't go any further without direction from the Commission.

Commissioner Wheeler commented that the Commission is still in the fact gathering process, but it looks like a pilot project is the way to go. He asked that Commissioner Wright provide an update at each meeting. Commissioners agreed to direct the Magic Valley Region to work on a hybrid LAP/Access Yes pilot project.

This issue of Access is on the agenda for the Gold Room hearing January 25. This pilot project would need to have legislative support. The Commission needs to get as much input from as many people as possible. Next step would be to do focus groups representing several of the different sportsmen's groups as well as landowner groups such as Cattle Association. It is critical to get buy-in before any decisions are made.

Current rules allow the Department to use up to 25% of tags for LAP. The only place that is being done is in Units 40, 42, and 45 in the Magic Valley. Other areas use 10-15%. The Commission might consider increasing the usage to 25% with 10% for LAP and 15% for Access Yes. Commissioner Wright does not anticipate the program would require a Rules change. Dallas Burkhalter, Deputy Attorney General, clarified that it may be best to have a Commission Rule once there is a pilot program to implement. This would be a non-biological rule and could be done in the fall rather than waiting for the January meeting.

The Fish and Game Advisory Committee provided the Commission with their recommendations. One was that LAP be left alone and the other to give consideration to enhancing Access Yes program through use of additional tags. The Commission is following the recommendations of F&G Advisory Committee.

The Chairman commented that the Commission hopes sportsmen's groups realize how hard they and the Department are working on their behalf on a host of important issues.

Bonus Point System Update

Brad Compton, State Big Game Manager, provided additional information regarding the options for a potential bonus point system (Appendix 39, Exhibit 16).

Options for change are: 1. No change, 2. Bonus Point System, 3. Single Species Application, 4. Extend Wait Period to 2 Years, 5. Reward System, 6. Combination

Mr. Compton provided a comparison of changes in drawing odds and economic impacts for each of the six options.

The bonus points subcommittee, comprised of Commissioners Power, Wright, and Wheeler, met with representatives from Nevada who suggested a software upgrade that would be a one-time cost. They noticed an increase in out-of-state applicants after initiating a bonus point system. The Department could buy the software from Nevada and then do some reprogramming either internally or using contractors. Staff has not worked out internal estimates for doing this in-house. Jim Lau, Chief, Bureau of Administration, explained that staff has estimated \$150,000 to \$200,000 to try to develop a system in-house. If the Department adopts a Nevada-type program, he would advocate contracting it out for at least the first year or two. Staff could learn from the outside expertise. An additional consideration is that staff will be busy with implementing a new license system during the same timeframe.

Commissioners discussed the economic impact. The budget is fully allocated, so a negative impact is not acceptable. When the discussion was initiated, it was with the understanding that any system would be revenue neutral to the Department and that any cost involved would have to be born by the sportsmen.

Commissioner Power explained that his perspective on modifications to the existing system was to give increased odds for the least cost. His interest was which is the best for sportsmen, bottom line. Nothing changes the chances of drawing in a high demand hunt by very much, and there is going to be a cost to any change.

Commissioner Wright explained that there has been a lot of discussion among sportsmen that they would like to see some type of a system. The survey indicated that an overwhelming majority said they would like to be rewarded for perseverance. There was a majority of respondents who wanted a bonus point system; however, when asked if they would pay \$11.25 (or \$5.00 more) a small majority said no. However, if the cost is only \$2.00, he believes the majority would rather have a system than not have one. The representatives from Nevada did feel there was a significant increase in income after their system was implemented.

There is legislation drafted to allow the Commission to increase the fee to implement a bonus point system. The legislation would have to pass and then rules will need to be prepared and details refined before a system could be implemented.

06-04 Commissioner Wright moved and Commissioner Gibbs seconded a motion **TO ADOPT A BONUS POINT SYSTEM.**

Commissioner Watts asked for clarification on whether the Commission was using Roberts Rules of Order or Masons so he could decide how to proceed. Dallas Burkhalter clarified that the Commission uses Roberts Rules of Order. Commissioner Wright withdrew his motion.

06-05 Commissioner Watts moved **TO MAINTAIN STATUS QUO**. The motion died for lack of a second.

06-06 Commissioner Wright moved and Commissioner Gibbs seconded a motion **TO DIRECT STAFF TO PROCEED WITH A BONUS POINT SYSTEM**. Vote: Ayes: Wright, Gibbs, Power, McDermott, Irby, Wheeler. Nays: Watts. The motion carried.

The intent of the subcommittee is to create opportunity for youth recruitment and retention. There will be discussion and ideas for further consideration. The Director asked that one of the Commissioners be prepared to explain to the Joint House and Senate Resources Committees on January 23 what the Commission intent is with regard to a bonus point system. The Chair asked Commissioner Wright to attend that meeting and explain the system. Commissioner Wright commented that details will need to be carefully considered.

Legislative Session Update

Sharon Kiefer, Legislative Liaison, presented an update on legislative activities. Staff has met with legislators in the Clearwater and Magic Valley Regions and has started on the JFAC presentation, which is scheduled from 9:45 – 11:00 a.m. on Monday, February 6. Chairman Wheeler will introduce the budget presentation. The Department has been working with Department of Agriculture staff to review Fish and Game's fur farm rules.

The Department's budget request was in line with the Governor's recommendation although he did not support the Department's request for 2 new FTEs. The Governor's recommendation on a 3% CEC and a 2 month insurance premium holiday will need to be factored into the budget.

Staff are working with the House and Senate Resource Chairs on the Joint Committee meetings. Monday, January, 23, the Department and Commission will present on bonus points and access issues including LAP and Access Yes. January 25 is set aside for sportsmen's groups to comment, and January 27 will continue with sportsmen's groups and for comment from the general public.

Staff are working with the Rules review process. Senator Schroeder has appointed a subcommittee for Rules review. The Legislative Subcommittee will meet to discuss legislation regarding bonus points.

Ms. Kiefer reviewed the procedure on weekly legislative conference calls. Commissioners were given a draft of the Open Meeting Notice for the conference calls (Appendix 39, Exhibit 17). These will be held each Wednesday morning at 8:00 a.m. The legislative subcommittee will receive information by Monday for discussion before the Wednesday calls. Email will be used to get information to Commissioners.

Ms. Kiefer and the Director will meet with Representatives Moyle and Edmunson on the January 17.

Executive Session

06-07 Commissioner Irby moved and Commissioner Gibbs seconded a motion **TO HOLD AN EXECUTIVE SESSION, PURSUANT TO IDAHO CODE 67-2345(1) TO DISCUSS PERSONNEL MATTERS. The motion carried in a unanimous vote.**

The Executive Session began at 4:24 p.m. and concluded at 5:24 p.m. No action was taken.

January 13, 2006

Commission Chairman Cameron Wheeler called the meeting to order at 8:03 a.m. Commissioners Irby, Watts, Wright, Gibbs, and Power were present.

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Update on WAFWA Mid-winter Meeting

Most information was covered in the Director's Report and Commissioner Watt's report. Other topics discussed at the meeting included ATVS, landowner voucher tags, and urban/wildlife conflict. The Director will provide copies of each state's status reports on these issues to Commissioners. The Director encouraged Commissioners to read the new book *The Endangered Species Act at 30*. The Director will get copies for all Commissioners.

Next summer's WAFWA Annual Meeting will be held in Bismarck, North Dakota, July 21-27. Next winter's meeting is in Arizona in early January. Any Commissioners who wish to attend are welcome.

Commissioners discussed moving the date of the March meeting to March 2-3 only with the public meeting on Wednesday, March 1. The focus will be on setting big game seasons.

Fisheries Report on Fishing and Boating Access

Bill Hutchinson, Assistant Bureau Chief, Fisheries, provided the Commission with information on the Department's access sites (Appendix 39, Exhibit 18).

Commissioner McDermott joined the meeting at 8:17 a.m.

To provide angler access, the Department manages 325 access sites across Idaho -- there are 169 fishing access sites and 156 boating sites. Fishing sites provide bank or shore fishing opportunities but without launching facilities for motorboats. Motorboat sites have launch ramps for motorboats and are eligible for development and maintenance funds through the Wallup-Breaux Federal Aid program. The Department is doing well and has sufficient funds to operate and to acquire new motorboat sites. However, there is a limited amount of funding for fishing access sites. The Department is able to maintain existing sites but no funds are available for renovation, upgrades, or new sites. Staffing is also an issue. The Department has skilled utility craftsmen, but there is too much work to be done.

Staff have done a complete inventory of each site, its facilities and their condition. The effort included information on how the site was used, its relative importance and what was needed at each site to bring the site up to its potential including a cost estimate. Staff then put together a plan to address the highest priorities based on an inventory, analysis of needs, cost estimates, and prioritization. Additional funds are needed, or the Department will have to close some sites because they are in poor shape. Department recommendations include additional license funds for match with Federal Aid monies.

We found that 228 of our 325 sites needed improvements – the total cost to do the improvements was estimated at \$5.5 million, \$2.3 million for fishing sites and \$3.2 million for boating sites. Renovating and getting to a standard will require funding. Renovations need to be ADA compliant for outhouses including ramps and handicapped toilets.

Commissioners discussed the importance of these sites and keeping the facilities well maintained. They have talked about using this information to justify another fee increase. The issue is getting the license dollars to fund the match for the federal aid. Staff is also working on in-kind match and using county and city dollars and partnering where possible. Those are more short-term options, but the Department needs a long-term commitment of funds. Other states are facing the same issues and there are efforts to address this at the national funding level.

ESA Status Review of Yellowstone Cutthroat

Steve Yundt, State Fish Manager, provided an update on the status of Yellowstone Cutthroat (YCT) in the state (Appendix 39, Exhibit 19).

The Department is expecting a decision on February 14 on whether the USFWS will list the Yellowstone cutthroat as a threatened species. Components of a status review include how many animals are present, what the population structure is — few or many populations, population trends – increasing, decreasing or stable, and genetic purity/hybridization. The Department contributed to a range-wide status review in 2001. This was the most comprehensive YCT survey done to date. Since then, the Department has been involved in an effort to show that there are numerous sub-populations throughout the range that have a lot of fish in them. There are large groups of fish in interconnected sites well distributed throughout the range which does not support the petitioner's argument that a random event will wipe out a large segment of the population.

The petitioners believe that once you have one hybridized fish, the whole population is tainted. The Department doesn't agree with that premise. In order to produce a hybrid swarm, you have to have random mating, which does not occur. There is a very small hybrid population. At 81% of the sample sites, the populations were pure. When you plant sterile fish, there are still a small percentage that are fertile. The petitioners continue to focus on the threat of hybridization as the path to extinction. There are a lot of variables with hybridization.

The initial petition was full of errors. When the Department commented, we told the USFWS that it needed to be redone. The Service threw it out and decided not to do a 12-month status review. The petitioners went back to court, and the Service then did decide to do a 12-month status review. The Department has worked hard with the FWS and has agreed to be in court to support the right technical decisions.

One of the Department's challenges is that the rules keep changing depending on which federal biologist is assigned to a review. A lot of the burdens are legal and not scientific. The Department is going to stick with the science. The Department has a strong case on YCT and Westslope CT. YCT are by far the most numerous species of trout in the Upper Snake River Basin and population trends are stable and half of subpopulations appear to be genetically pure. The Department is working to improve these populations.

Idaho Bird Inventory Survey (IBIS)

Rex Sallabanks, Nongame Bird Program Coordinator, presented the Department's monitoring plan for nongame birds (Appendix 39, Exhibit 20). IBIS is a statewide, all-bird, coordinated monitoring plan. It is hoped that IBIS will ultimately monitor all species of birds in Idaho year round. Such a monitoring program provide critical information to make decisions on conservation and management, identify species with greatest needs, establish priorities, and evaluate habitat improvement projects.

The written IBIS plan includes background information, identification of highest priority management issues, and site descriptions for wetlands sites around the state.

2004 was the pilot season for IBIS, and the initial focus was on aquatic species. The program was greatly expanded in 2005 to include monthly waterbird surveys, marshbird surveys, and colony counts. Researchers made new discoveries and updated information about the distribution and abundance of Idaho's birds. In the next 2-3 years, the Department will continue the waterbird inventory, adopt a coordinated rotational schedule with partner states, recruit volunteers, implement the landbird component of IBIS, and begin to address the highest priority management issues.

IBIS has identified nine management issues: identifying species at risk, wetland loss and degradation, conflicts between birds and fish, how changes in riparian habitats influence birds, aspen condition and importance for birds, identify high quality sagebrush communities, forest thinning and fuels reduction projects, management in pinon-juniper habitats, and inventory of the Department's WMAs.

In 2005, waterbirds were counted on 11 WMAs. Results show that the Department's WMAs provide critical breeding habitat for many nongame species. A number of WMAs provide significant habitat for nongame waterbirds including 25 identified as species of greatest conservation need in Idaho's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. Many of the highest priority waterbirds are breeding at the WMAs. These results suggest that traditional activities on WMAs and conservation of nongame birds can occur simultaneously and be complementary. IBIS is beginning to generate important information for Idaho's nongame birds, and prospects are good for the program.

Commissioners discussed the fact that no license dollars go to nongame management. The income tax checkoff option and sale of wildlife license plates are the two main funding sources. A recent boost has been the State Wildlife Grants program. The Department also partners heavily with the BLM, Forest Service, and USFWS, which provide funding as well. For example, BLM is contributing funding to the IBIS project. The Department may need to make a stronger effort to help the general public and hunters understand the interaction between game and nongame management and what is brought to the table from nongame management efforts. Some of the management objectives are the same as those for other projects such as MDI.

Legislative Update

The Director informed the Commission that JFAC passed the governor's recommendation for a supplemental CEC effective the end of January.

License System Update

Jim Lau, Chief, Bureau of Administration, informed the Commission that GTECH Corporation has been sold and they will not be submitting a proposal for the Department's licensing system. The Department has had ongoing discussions with GTECH on the system performance failures. The Department had requested compensation which GTECH counter-offered with an unacceptable settlement. They have continued to acknowledge the issue and have put some options on the table to compensate the Department including assistance with transition to a new system and/or allowing the department to retain some equipment. Continuing dialog. Will hold a pre-bid conference next week for vendors interesting in submitting bids.

Wolf Management

Jim Unsworth asked the Commission to approve proceeding with the Department's Clearwater wolf management proposal.

06-08 Commissioner Irby moved and Commissioner Wright seconded a motion **TO ACCEPT STAFF'S RECOMMENDATION TO MOVE FORWARD WITH THE CLEARWATER WOLF MANAGEMENT PROPOSAL**. The motion carried in a unanimous vote.

Brucellosis Efforts in Eastern Idaho

Phil Mamer, Wildlife Veterinary Medical Officer, provided Commissioners with background and status of elk migration routes and the incidence of brucellosis in the state (Appendix 39, Exhibit 21).

The disease is spread when a cow elk aborts a calf and another elk or cow licks the birthing fluids or the remnants of the fluids. The brucella organism can live up to 90 days in cool, wet conditions.

Dr. Mamer updated the Commission on efforts at the Rainey Creek feedground where the Department traps and tests cow elk for brucellosis. The Department has been feeding elk at Rainey Creek since the 1970s to keep them from going on to farms and ranches to find food, but feeding elk increases the prevalence of brucellosis. Elk trapped and collared at Rainey Creek have been monitored. These elk summer in Wyoming and winter in Idaho. Fish and Game has been testing elk at Rainey Creek since 1998. Positive cows go to slaughter, and the negative cows are released. 17% of all the elk cows each year have tested as reactors since 1998. Removing infected cows that come to the trap, removes those most likely to go to a cattle feed line and transfer the disease. The Department also distributes a significant number of brucellosis sample kit surveys to elk hunters in various hunting units. There has been a good survey response.

Idaho's Brucellosis management program is a three-pronged approach incorporating elk population management with disease control, encouraging and assisting in the improvement of elk winter range, and reducing the availability of hay which can cause artificially high concentrations of elk.

Idaho decided not to vaccinate elk because it is not very effective, and the animals must be concentrated in order to do the testing. The vaccine does not create sterile immunity but prevents abortion. It is not currently possible to completely eradicate the bug – just to prevent it from getting into a free-ranging wildlife population. New vaccines are being developed.

The Department has chosen to address chronic feeding areas, trap and cull positives, provide habitat enhancement, provide alternative pastures, and to fence stackyards and pastures where needed to separate where elk winter and where cows are fed. The Department's intent is to fence all the stackyards in Regions 5 and 6 to prevent elk from coming to those stackyards. Funding comes from depredation funds and from Department of Agriculture through Federal Aid.

Commissioners asked about Wyoming's program where they vaccinate according to statute. Wyoming has to feed their elk to maintain the population. Brucellosis will keep bleeding over from Wyoming as long as Wyoming feeds elk. Idaho will use feeding when necessary but won't do it near cattle or use permanent feed sites. It is important to keep elk spread out and on natural forage.

Commissioners discussed the Department's continued efforts and what can be improved. The best way to get rid of brucellosis is to eliminate feedgrounds, but that is very difficult to do once they are started. Dr. Mamer stated that the main goal of Idaho's elk management approach is to maintain separation between cattle and elk. The Department will continue to work with the Department of Agriculture. The Cattle Association and Department of Agriculture will look at task force recommendations and evaluate current practices at a February meeting.

Closing Comments

Commissioners discussed doing more to encourage people to donate to nongame funding through the state income tax checkoff.

Adjournment

The Commission meeting adjourned at 11:19 a.m.